Report on Growth & Density Issues Faced by School Jurisdictions

June 8, 2000

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Report on Growth & Density Issues Faced by School Jurisdictions

In July 1999, the Minister of Learning, Honourable Dr. Lyle Oberg, announced that, in response to the recommendations of the Funding Framework Review Committee, chaired by Grande Prairie-Peace Wapiti MLA, Wayne Jacques, a review of issues related to growth and density factors faced by school jurisdictions would be undertaken. In December 1999, the Minister announced the members of the committee as well as the Terms of Reference under which the committee would work.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Two meetings were held in January to allow stakeholders the opportunity to participate in the review process. Representatives from the Alberta School Boards Association, the Association of School Business Officials of Alberta, and the College of Alberta School Superintendents were asked to identify issues, impacts and solutions related to growth and density factors faced by school jurisdictions. The issues identified by the school jurisdiction representatives were broad. Their recommended solutions ranged from reviewing the entire funding framework to fine-tuning specific grants. The committee received 14 written submissions from school boards and when required also attended meetings with individual boards.

There was general support for the need to address issues related to growth and density. However, strong opposition was expressed to making any adjustments to the current funding formula that would adversely affect jurisdictions that are not facing pressure resulting from growth and density factors. The input received during the consultation process has been categorized to allow for easy discussion. These categories are:

(A) School Facilities Issues

The issues surrounding the processes for receiving approval for and the costs of opening a new school facility dominated discussion in both the stakeholder meetings and the written submissions. Representatives from school jurisdictions expressed concern about the current application of the utilization formula, which is used to determine when a jurisdiction qualifies for school construction funding. Concerns also focused on the administrative processes required to request funding, as well as the time lag between when a request is made and when a facility is operational. Furthermore, jurisdictions indicated that in addition to the costs of administering and coordinating the start up process for a new school, the costs associated with equipping and furnishing a school before initial operation are not adequately addressed.

(B) Enrolment Growth Issues

Significant feedback was received regarding the relationship between operational costs and enrolment growth. Some jurisdictions indicated that enrolment growth results in higher one-time per-student costs. Incremental costs include those associated with the purchase of instructional supplies, and with the additional administrative burden resulting from the need to plan and provide services being supplied to students.

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Jurisdictions also indicated that appropriate resources should be allocated to address in-year (after September 30th) enrolment growth to reflect the immediate costs of serving these students.

(C) Economic Growth Issues

Isolated economic growth that is significantly above the provincial average can create unique problems for some school jurisdictions. In areas where significant economic growth is associated with higher labour costs, school jurisdictions may be forced to pay significantly higher than average salaries and benefits, particularly for those trades people required to provide operations, maintenance, and transportation services to students. This situation currently exists in the City of Fort McMurray; the expansion of oil sands projects has caused significant economic growth. The two boards operating in the City must compete with other employers for skilled labour in an already inflated labour market. Similarly, prices for necessary supplies, which have historically been higher in Fort McMurray due to location, have been further inflated during this period of rapid economic growth.

(D) Density Issues

(1) Density of the Student Population

The issue of student population density and higher associated costs due to the complexities in providing services to a large number of students was raised by a number of school jurisdictions. In particular, it was argued that the four major urban boards[1] face higher than average costs, primarily because they serve a large number of students and as a result, the costs associated with planning for and providing ongoing services to students is higher than average.

(2) Socio-Economic Factors

Many jurisdictions suggested that greater recognition should be given to the costs associated with serving areas with significantly higher than average proportions of students with low socio-economic status. Jurisdictions argued that, because socio-economic status and student achievement is correlated, a legitimate need exists for additional funding in these areas to support special programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS

After careful consideration and discussion of all the input received from stakeholders, the committee made recommendations, and where appropriate, included comments to be considered for reviews currently in progress or to be conducted in the near future.

[1] Edmonton Public School District #7, Edmonton Catholic Regional Division #40, Calgary Public School District # 19, and Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School District # 1.

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School Facilities

Recommendation 1:

The departments of Alberta Learning and Infrastructure should develop and implement a process to ensure data[2] and analysis for planning purposes is shared between the two departments and school jurisdictions. Examples include provincial and jurisdiction enrolment actuals and projections, as well as jurisdiction-specific economic forecasts and data.

Comments

Alberta Learning and Alberta Infrastructure often have access to economic and demographic data and analysis which are not readily available to school jurisdictions. Stakeholders indicated the importance of sharing this particular information between the two departments, and when appropriate, providing the same to school jurisdictions to assist them in their planning process. The committee cautioned that any process developed to share information should not increase the administrative burden for school jurisdictions.

Implementation

Efforts to maintain and improve information sharing between departments should be continued. A process to ensure that school jurisdictions are receiving all the relevant information available should be developed immediately.

Address The Lag Time Between The Occurrence Of An Issue And The Provision Of Resources

Recommendation 2:

Alberta Infrastructure should continue ongoing efforts to improve the processes by which school facilities requests are submitted and approved. The committee strongly recommends that the provision of school facilities continues to be a top priority of government and that maximum available resources be directed to this area.

Comments

The committee noted that jurisdictions appear to be pleased with the new processes implemented by Alberta Infrastructure to improve the request and approval procedures for school facilities. The issue of the lag between the occurrence of growth and the provision of facilities is no longer related to administrative factors. Rather, it is an issue of the availability of funds to support school capital projects.

- The report of the School Facilities Task Force entitled *A Report on a new School Facilities Capital Plan*, released in January 1998, identified a backlog of $771 million in school facilities maintenance and modernization needs. An audit of all school facilities in Alberta is being undertaken to confirm the actual level of this backlog.

[2] Data from Municipal, Federal and Provincial government sources.

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- School facilities projects will be prioritized based on the results of the school facilities audit. It is likely the demand for both new facilities and maintenance and modernization will increase.
- Current funding levels allow for approval of approximately 1 in 4 requests for new school facilities.

Implementation
A review of the process for submitting and approving requests is currently underway. A new electronic system has been developed and is being tested with implementation slated for July 2000.

The Utilization Formula

Recommendation 3:

The committee recommends that Alberta Infrastructure ensure that sufficient funding is provided to meet the need for new facilities resulting from enrolment growth.

Comments
In January 1998, *A Report on a new School Facilities Capital Plan* was released by the School Facilities Task Force. The report of the School Facilities Task Force, chaired by Gary Severtson, MLA for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, made 41 recommendations, 39 of which were policy-related and accepted by government. The task force's two fiscal recommendations were deferred for consideration as part of the government's overall fiscal plan.

Several recommendations of the task force have already been addressed by Alberta Infrastructure. This department has also developed an action plan to further address the recommendations of the task force.

Implementation
Immediately

Recommendation 4:
The committee recommends that, during Alberta Infrastructure's review of school facilities policies, the department continue to investigate the utilization formula and that the following factors be considered:

- A greater proportion of space is required for special needs students than is needed for other students in order to provide educational services. An adjustment to recognize this fact is already in place however; the committee felt that this issue warranted further investigation.

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- The utilization formula should account for the fact that a portion of the existing school space was not intended for classroom space and cannot be practically converted into classroom space (i.e. cafeterias, student gathering areas).
- The utilization formula should recognize the fact that it is sometimes not possible to convert existing school space from one usage to another without additional capital resources from Infrastructure.
- The utilization formula should be adjusted to account for geographic pockets of growth and the demographic nature of population growth within rural and urban school jurisdictions. Calculations of utilization rates on a jurisdiction level may not account for the fact that significant growth is occurring in specific areas of a jurisdiction, and that transportation to existing school facilities may not be practical.

Implementation

Alberta Infrastructure has set up a committee whose membership includes education stakeholders to investigate issues surrounding the utilization formula. Results from this committee are expected by fall 2000.

Recommendation 5:

The committee strongly recommends that, as part of the response to the School Facilities Task Force Report, Alberta Infrastructure and Alberta Learning ensure that sufficient funding is provided to school jurisdictions to accommodate start up costs associated with furnishing and equipping new school facilities.

Costs for consideration include:

- Technology hardware;
- Technology software;
- Education supplies and materials (textbooks, instructional supplies, science instruments and CTS equipment);
- Audiovisual equipment;
- Physical education supplies;
- Staffing costs related to administering the project (1/2 FTE for the year prior to the opening of a new school);
- Staffing costs related the costs of employing a principal (1/2 a FTE) to coordinate and prepare supports and services for the operation of the new facility;
- Furniture and desks;
- Library costs; and
- Costs associated with land acquisition(s).

Comments

A significant volume of input was received from stakeholders on the issue of providing funding to cover the start up costs associated with opening a new school.

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Currently, 9% of the funding provided for new school construction is intended to cover the costs of purchasing the equipment and supplies to operate a school. The committee felt that the current level of funding needs to be reviewed and, if necessary, enhanced to ensure that boards receiving new facilities are not required to divert regular operational funding to cover the costs of opening a new school. The committee also felt it was important to ensure that sufficient funding was provided to cover the costs of administering, coordinating and preparing the supports and services necessary for the operation of the new facility.

Implementation
Immediately

Enrolment Growth

Recommendation 6:

Jurisdictions experiencing growth during the year in grades 1 to 9 should automatically receive additional funding. This funding would be provided if the number of students in grades 1 to 9 served by a jurisdiction increased from the September 30th count as compared to March 01. No adjustment would be made for jurisdictions experiencing in-year enrolment declines. Funding equal to 1/2 of the total amount for which the student would be eligible for had the board served the student for a full year should be provided.

Comments

The costs of growth during the year for grades 10 to 12 are largely accommodated through the current Credit Enrolment Unit (CEU) funding system. Under the CEU funding system, jurisdictions are provided funding when instructional services are provided and courses are completed. For example, if a student enrolls in a class in January and completes the course, jurisdictions receive basic instruction funding as applicable operations and maintenance and administration funding.

Alberta has experienced significant enrolment growth in Full Time Equivalent (FTE)[3] students during the past several years; increases average approximately 2% over the 1995/1996 to 1997/1998 period. This growth was due to a relatively high and increasing migratory[4] trend into the province, and to the increase in the average number of credits taken per high school student. Growth in enrolment declined to 1.77% for the 1998/1999 school year. This decline is expected to continue over the next three school years to a level of 1% in the 2002/2003 school year.

The rate of enrolment growth for the province is expected to decline for the following reasons:

1. With static migration levels, population statistics indicate that the number of students entering grade 1 is and will continue to be significantly less than the

[3] Head count for students in grades 1 to 9. Grades 10 to 12 students are counted as full time equivalent students where a FTE student is defined as taking 35 credits per year.
[4] Migration from other provinces and countries.

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number of students graduating grade 12.

2. Net migration levels are projected to remain high but are not projected to increase significantly over current levels, primarily due to the strength of other provincial economies.
3. No further growth in the average number of credits taken per student is anticipated.

Implementation
September 2000

Recommendation 7:

The committee recommends that one-time funding for real, year to year enrolment growth be provided to school jurisdictions at 12.5% of the Basic Instruction rate (which translates into $512 per student) based on the growth levels of individual schools within a jurisdiction. Jurisdictions in which individual schools experience enrolment growth of 8% would be eligible for additional funding.

Comments
Jurisdictions indicated that enrolment growth results in a one-time increase of operational costs such as those associated with the purchase of additional textbooks, supplies and materials as well those associated with planning, and supplying appropriate services to new students.

In considering this issue, the committee was particularly concerned about addressing the fact that significant enrolment growth often occurs in pockets of a jurisdiction. However, as some areas of a jurisdiction may not be experiencing growth, jurisdiction level enrolment data may not indicate that enrolment growth has occurred in a pocket of a jurisdiction. Therefore, the committee chose to recommend that an adjustment be made on the basis of a school level calculation, which compares school enrolments from one year to the next. This method of calculation has several advantages. First, it allows for additional funding to be provided as a result of demographic or economic factors such as when a jurisdiction is experiencing significant enrolment growth in one area. Second, the calculation will address the costs associated with inter-jurisdiction migration of students from one school to another.

Implementation
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Economic Growth

Recommendation 8:

The committee recommends that Alberta Learning investigate a funding adjustment for school jurisdictions to address the higher costs of serving students in areas resulting from unique geographic, and economic conditions. This review should include a re-evaluation of the current distance factor adjustment in the instruction block, in operations and maintenance, as well as consideration of the additional costs of providing transportation services in these areas. This adjustment should be reviewed annually to ensure its appropriateness.

Comments

Economic growth that is significantly higher than the provincial average can create unique problems for some school jurisdictions. In areas where significant economic growth is associated with higher labour costs, school jurisdictions may be forced to pay significantly higher than average salaries and benefits, particularly for trades people required to provide operations and maintenance and transportation services to students. This situation currently exists in the City of Fort McMurray where expansion of oil sands projects has caused significant economic growth. The two boards operating in the City must compete with other employers for skilled labour in an already inflated labour market. Similarly, prices for necessary supplies, which have historically been higher in Fort McMurray due to its location, have been further inflated during this period of rapid economic growth.

The commitee indicated that Alberta learning should consider a floor level, of cost due to economic growth, below which no adjustment would be provided. For example, 2 per cent above the provincial average consumer price index.

The committee suggested that any adjustment resulting from a recommendation to address these situations should be provided in such a way that it does not affect jurisdiction salary grids of the boards. One way of accomplishing this would be to reserve a portion of the adjustment provided as a "specific cost of living allowance", to be paid outside the current grids of the boards.

Implementation

September 2000

Complexity

Recommendation 9:

The committee recommends that Technology Integration and Early Childhood Services (ECS) funding be included in the base upon which administration funding for school boards is calculated.

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Comments

Under the current funding framework no explicit funding to administer Early Childhood Services (ECS) programs or Technology Integration programs is provided to school jurisdictions. Funding to administer ECS programs is provided as part of basic instruction funding. The committee felt that, in order to recognize the costs of providing administrative support for these programs, funding allocated to support ECS and Technology programs should be included in the base used by Alberta Learning to calculate administration funding for jurisdictions.

Implementation

September 2000

Density Of The Student Population

Recommendation 10:

Additional funding be provided to school jurisdictions to address the unique challenges faced by boards operating in densely populated areas[1].

Comments

Significant feedback was received regarding the costs associated with serving students in densely populated areas. Stakeholders indicated that additional resources are often required to support the incremental costs of providing services to students operating in densely populated areas. These costs are associated with:

1. The potential requirement for additional instructional and support staff (i.e. teacher assistants) in areas where classroom space is limited.

2. The need for more frequent routine maintenance of schools due to high utilization.

3. The need for computer systems to track and plan services for large numbers of students and to track student performance. Boards in areas experiencing growth and density often deal with complicated and highly skilled administrative structures.

4. The requirement to offer broad program and curricular options necessitated by the dense and diverse student population.

5. The movement of staff to serve students who choose to attend magnet school instead of their designated school.

Implementation:

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[1] Areas where there are a relatively large number of students in a relatively small geographic area.

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Socio-economic Factors

Recommendation 11:

Overall funding for the Enhanced Opportunity Projects (EOP) should be increased. This increase would allow for the enhancement of programs currently approved, as well as provide funding for additional programs for which funding has been requested but not approved due to existing budget constraints. Further steps should be taken by Alberta Learning to ensure the administrative requirements associated with this funding are minimized.

Comments

Research shows that educational achievement and poverty are correlated. Students coming from low-income families are likely to achieve lower results than their peers. The committee felt it was important to recognize the unique challenges faced by jurisdictions and students in areas where a large number of students are economically or socially disadvantaged[6].

EOP funding is currently provided to school jurisdictions to meet the needs of students who are economically or socially disadvantaged through the Enhanced Opportunity Project grant. Projects may be funded in schools where 50% or more of the students are affected by one or more of the following:

- High incidence of low income;
- High incidence of single parent families;
- High incidence of unemployment or under-employment;
- High frequency of changes in residence;
- High incidence of recent arrivals in Canada and low parental facility with the language of instruction; and
- High incidence of crime.

Funding is provided for projects in up to 15% of the schools in each jurisdiction.

The additional funding will allow for the operation of more projects as well as the improvement of existing ones.

Implementation

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[6] Schools where a relatively large number (dense population) of students are socially or economically disadvantaged are located throughout the province.

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Recommendation 12:

The committee recommends that the Special Education Review Team investigate and address the concerns of school jurisdictions regarding the incidence rate of special needs students across the province. In particular, the team should thoroughly review claims by school jurisdictions that they attract and serve a proportionately larger than average level of students with special needs, and provide additional compensation if it is determined that increased hardship is occurring. Alberta Learning should ensure that the level of resources provided to school jurisdictions serving special needs students is sufficient to cover the costs of providing that service.

Comments

On March 15, 2000, the Minister of Learning, Honourable Dr. Lyle Oberg, announced that Alberta Learning would review the delivery of Special Education programs and services. This review will build on work already initiated by Alberta Learning and the College of Alberta School Superintendents with respect to improving supports for students with severe disabilities. It will also address the amount of administration required to process claims for funding and the delivery of programs and services required for students with special needs.

The review process will involve consultation with stakeholder groups and education partners such as the Alberta Home and School Councils' Association, the Alberta Teachers' Association, the Alberta School Boards Association as well as other groups representing parents of children with special needs. Ideas and input gathered will be submitted to the Minister of Learning by August 2000.

The committee applauds the recently announced change to severe special needs student funding. Until now, the department did not adjust funding levels during the school year to accommodate the movement of students with severe special needs from one school authority to another. Following what is called the September 30 count date, the school authority where a child with severe special needs was enrolled received that student's funding for the entire year; however, the new jurisdiction would not receive any additional severe special needs funding.

With this change, the original school board will keep the funding to ensure continuity of its programs, while the receiving school authority also will receive funding that reflects it has a new student with severe special needs enrolled in its system. The committee views this change as a significant and positive step towards addressing some of the growth issues involved in serving severely disabled students.

Implementation

The comments of the committee will be immediately forwarded to the Special Education Review Team. A report by the team is expected to be submitted in August 2000.

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Recommendation 13:

The committee noted that significant growth and density puts added pressure on already over extended school board administrators. Alberta Learning will work to change processes in order to reduce and streamline overall administrative requirements especially in the area of the reporting and approval processes for funding.

Implementation

This process should beigin immediately.

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Appendix Two

Attendees of Stakeholder Meetings

Attendee	Representing the Jurisdiction of
Dan Anderson	Northern Lights
Dick Bennett	Edmonton Catholic
Gerald Bernakevitch	Evergreen
Orville Borys	Black Gold
Michael Brenneis	St. Albert PSSD
Maurice Campeau	Lakeland
Monika Cappis	Parkland
Sharon Clarkson	Fort McMurray Public
John Convey	Elk Island Catholic
Mike Davenport	Fort Vermilion
Don Duncan	Lloydminster Public
Joanne Foster	Elk Island Public
Francois Gagnon	Fort McMurray RCSS
Marco Gervais	High Prairie
Victor Gladue	Northland
Randy Hoffman	Fort McMurray Public
Metro Huculak	St. Thomas Aquinas
Jody Hunt	Greater St. Albert Catholic
Alberta Hutchings	Elk Island Catholic
Andy Isbister	Sturgeon
Stan Jeffreys	Northern Gateway
Elouise Johnson	Peace Wapiti
Alvin Johnston	Grande Yellowhead
Armin Kauppila	St. Albert PSS
Gary Krawchuk	Northern Lights
Maureen Kubinec	Pembina Hills
Dan LaPierre	East Central Catholic
Keith Lambert	Fort Vermilion
Terry Langis	Fort McMurray Catholic
Len Leithead	Northland
Henry Lemire	Greater North Central Francophone
Lee Lucente	Greater St. Albert Catholic
Mel. J. Malowany	Evergreen
Laurie Marston	High Prairie
Bruce Moltzon	Peace River

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Attendee	Representing the Jurisdiction of
Robert Nantel	Greater North Central Francophone
Dave Van Tamelen	Peace River
Diana Zier-Vogel	Grande Yellowhead
Art Aitken	Prairie Land
Linda Blasetti	Calgary RCSSD No.1
Roy Brassard	Chinook's Edge
Wayne Braun	Golden Hills
Les Brost	Prairie Rose
Brian Callaghan	Canadian Rockies
Mel Cottle	Westwind
Darrell Couture	Rocky View
Don Dart	Calgary Public
Don Dolan	Red Deer Catholic
Art Eeles	Golden Hills
Paulette Hanna	East Central Alberta Catholic
Cindy Jefferies	Red Deer Public
Eric Johnson	Horizon
Carolyn Kaiser	Foothills
Lorne Kosack	Rocky View
Fred Kramer	Medicine Hat Public
Murray Lloyd	Foothills
Len Luders	Red Deer Public
Don Lussier	Lethbridge
Jim McLellan	Wild Rose
Karel Meulenbroek	Holy Spirit
Donna Michaels	Calgary Public
Len Miller	Christ the Redeemer
Don Olsen	Livingstone Range
David Pickersgill	Calgary Public
Doug Pudwell	Medicine Hat Public
Daune Roy	Prairie Land
Larry Schwenneker	Wolf Creek
Jeremy Simms	Calgary RCSSD No.1
Paul Stevenson	Lethbridge
Lyall Thomson	Chinook's Edge
Kelly Van Ham	Medicine Hat Catholic
Ron Wallace	Christ the Redeemer

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Attendee	Representing the Jurisdiction of
Marilyn Welsch	Holy Spirit
Warren Wilde	Westwind
Lee Ann Woods	Grasslands

Regrets

Ted Cabaj	St. Paul Education
Gemma Christie	Living Waters
Ray Danyluk	St. Paul Education
Robert Gauthier	Lakeland
Clayton Jespersen	Pembina Hills
Terry Jewell	Sturgeon
Terry LaBoucane	St. Paul Education
Ed Wittchen	Northern Lights
Fran Amundsen	Livingstone Range
Gillian Bushrod	Clearview
Patricia Cocks	Prairie Rose
Gord Deck	Red Deer Catholic
Jack Gleason	Palliser
Keith Jones	Prairie Rose
Lyle Lorenz	Wolf Creek
Terry Pearson	Buffalo Trail RD No.28
Lee Pickett	Grasslands
Nancy Thornton-Smith	Canadian Rockies

In addition, three meetings where held with board members and jurisdiction officials of the:

- Calgary public and Calgary catholic boards
- Edmonton public and Edmonton Catholic boards
- Fort McMurray public and Fort McMurray catholic boards

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